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SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN ENVIRONMENT UPDATE MARCH 31, 2006

¶1. Summary: This information is drawn primarily from the Kazakhstani press and has not yet been verified. The opinions expressed in this report, therefore, should not be interpreted as official positions and/or policy of the U.S. Government.

-- Kazakhstan Bans Waterfowl Hunting For Fear Of Bird Flu
-- New Scientific Research Complex To Be Built In Astana
-- New Ecological Code To Be Adopted in QIV, 2006
-- China Prepares New Project on Use of Ile River Water
-- "Kazzink" JSC to Build Copper Plant in Ust-Kamenogorsk
-- Number of Saiga Antelope in Kazakhstan Has Grown
-- Floods Begin in Kazakhstan
-- "Live Balkhash 2006" Ile-Balkhash Regatta to Start Apr 29
-- Dead Swan Infected with Bird Flu Found in the West
-- Plague Hits Poultry in South-East
-- Southern Coast of Lake Balkhash May Become an Ecological Catastrophe Zone
-- Transboundary Shu River Changes Course
-- President Nazarbayev Dismisses Minister of Environmental Protection
-- Environmental Prosecutor's Office Takes Action Against Tengizchevroil
-- Cosmic Flight Observation Center Opens in Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan Bans Waterfowl Hunting For Fear Of Bird Flu

¶11. According to the Chairman of the Health Ministry's Committee for Forestry and Hunting, Nauryzbay Khadayrkeyev, waterfowl hunting has been banned in Kazakhstan from March 1st to May 15th in order to prevent the bird flu from spreading. A separate TV report also said that a working group had been set up to coordinate preventive measures. (BBC Monitoring Central Asia, Khabar Agency, February 28, 2006)

New Scientific Research Complex to Be Built In Astana

¶12. The government recently discussed developing biotechnologies in Astana, where the construction of a scientific research complex will begin in the near future. Medical, agricultural and environmental facilities are planned for construction and according to experts, 10 high priority research topics have already been determined. Prime Minister Danial Akhmetov stated that it is necessary to have negotiations with foreign specialists. A recent decision provides the allocation of additional funding for new laboratory equipment and improved conditions for scientists (Khabar Agency, March 1, 2006)

New Ecological Code To Be Adopted in Q4, 2006

¶13. The Vice-Minister of the Environment, Zhambyl Bekzhanov, stated during the March 13, 2006 public hearings that a new Ecological Code may be adopted in QIV, 2006. The main goal of the Ecological Code is to reform Kazakhstan's ecological legislation in compliance with EU standards and is intended to regulate the legal mechanisms that implement state environmental policy.

¶14. According to the Environmental Minister, Kamaltni Mukhamedzhanov, effective economic levers, prevention of ecological violations and introduction of advanced technologies will replace direct command and control regulatory system and punitive penalties. Standards of natural management will take into account not only human security, but also the security of animals, plants and the ecosystem as a whole. The law also envisages requiring the obligatory utilization of wastes from hazardous industries (Egemen Kazakhstan, Express K, Izvestiya, Khabar Agency, March 14, 2006; Kazakhstan Today, March 13, 2006).
China Prepares New Project on Use of Ile River Water

¶15. According to Talgat Baimukhametov, a Kazinform correspondent in China, a project has been prepared in the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region of China to develop desert lands using water from the Ile River that flows from China to Kazakhstan. Specialists have completed the project feasibility study and have determined 14 experimental zones of developing land and natural resources. The cost of the project is estimated at 12,296 billion yuans and envisages expanding the area of arable lands by 353,000 hectares. The total area of the lands to be developed amounts to 731,000 hectares and covers the territory of seven districts and part of the lands of the Labor Army of China (Kazinform, March 10, 2006).
"Kazzink" JSC to Build Copper Plant in Ust-Kamenogorsk

16. "Kazzink" JSC authorities have proposed the construction of copper and electrolysis plants on their territory, which will allow a reduction of sulfur dioxide, dust, lead and other harmful emissions by 13,000 tons a year by using a hermetically sealed technological processes. The new project will permit balancing ore-dressing possibilities with metallurgical capacities. The plant will produce additional metals, provide a way to utilize industrial wastes and exclude contamination of surface water (Express K, March 1, 2006).

Number of Saiga Antelope in Kazakhstan Has Grown

17. The Committee on Forestry and Game Husbandry noted during the expanded meeting of the Ministry of Agriculture that, due to the efforts from state agencies, the number of saiga antelope had grown from 18,400 to 39,600 (Kazakhstanskaya Pravda, March 2, 2006).

Floods Begin in Kazakhstan

18. Kazakhstan Today reported that on March 11, 2006 there was a windstorm in the Eastern Kazakhstan Oblast and, as a consequence, 15 districts lost electricity. The material damage is being calculated and no information about victims has been reported (gazeta, kz, March 16, 2006)

"Live Balkhash 2006" Ile-Balkhash Regatta to Start Apr 29

19. The sixth international Ile-Balkhash regatta "Live Balkhash 2006" will start on the Ile River on April 29. The goal of the event is to attract the attention of the GOK as well as public and neighboring states to the problem of water usage from trans-boundary rivers and reservoirs, while preserving biodiversity of the Ile-Balkhash ecosystem and developing tourism and sports. The length of the regatta is 900 km.

10. According to the Chairman of the "Tabigat" PA, M. Eleusizov, only 70 people participated in the regatta 6 years ago; this year they expect 50 teams with more than a thousand participants. The total area of the Ile-Balkhash basin ecosystem in Kazakhstan is 353000 sq. km and the Ile river measures 815 km in length. The sustainability of the Ile-Balkhash basin and its ecosystem depends on the volume of water flowing in the Ile river from the Chinese territory (Interfax-Kazakhstan, March 15, 2006)

Dead Swan Infected with Bird Flu Found in the West

11. The Ministry of Agriculture released an official statement that the dead swan found near Aktau was infected from virus H5N1. The Chief Veterinarian of the RK, Asylbek Kozhamuratov, reported that all poultry in the Mangystau Oblast has been vaccinated. The Kurgaldzhino Lakes in the Akmola Oblast, where many migrating birds stay, are currently under observation (Khabar, March 23, 2006).

Plague Hits Poultry in South-East West

12. The deputy head of the region's sanitary and epidemiology service Galiya Abdrikhanova, said that dead poultry was found yesterday in the yards of two houses in the Maylybay village in the Yenbekshikazakh District (Almaty Oblast). Experts took samples of the poultry and sent them to the regional veterinary laboratory in Almaty, where preliminary reports indicate that the cause of death was Newcastle disease. The poultry farms have since been disinfected and the dead birds destroyed. (Interfax-Kazakhstan, March 23, 2006).

Southern Coast of Lake Balkhash May Become an Ecological Catastrophe Zone

13. A massive fish kill was registered in the Ile river this spring. For several years, experts have been noticing a lowering of the water level in the river and this spring the water failed to reach even the minimum level that was needed to cover the river delta that serves as a spawning area. Now, the maximum depth of the river hardly reaches 2 meters. Experts believe that to prevent salinization and desertification of the Ile-Balkhash region, it is necessary to urgently regulate the discharge of water from the Kapshagai HES and adopt an intergovernmental conservation agreement for the Ile river. Otherwise, the largest artery of Semirechye threatens to become a zone of ecological catastrophe (Khabar Agency, March 23, 2006).

Transboundary Shu River Changes Course

14. Hundreds of hectares of land have appears on the territory of Kyrgyzstan as a result of new stream deflectors on the Kyrgyz side of the Shu river, which have sharply changed its watercourse. Consequently, the property of some Kazakhstani citizens turned out to be located in Kyrgyzstan, as the border between the two republics passes along the river. Local authorities in Kazakhstan tried to take preventive measures and build equivalent stream deflectors on the Kazakhstani side, but the funds allowed for only 2 km of dams. The heads of the Shu-Talas Water Basin Administration reminded the Water Economy Department of Kyrgyzstan about the intergovernmental agreement, which clearly states that bank protection projects for transboundary rivers must be completed in agreement with Kazakhstan (Khabar Agency, March 23, 2006).

President Nazarbayev Dismisses Minister of Environmental Protection

15. The Kazakhstani President Nursultan Nazarbaev signed a decree

removing Environment Protection Minister Kamaljin Mukhamedzhanov from office. The press release reads that he was dismissed "in pursuance of his resignation" (Interfax-Kazakhstan, March 28, 2006)
Environment Prosecutor's Office Has Taken Action Against Tengizchevroil

¶16. The Environment Prosecutor's Office has filed a suit against Tengizchevroil after it was revealed that Tengizchevroil had exceeded its atmospheric emissions quota. Current Kazakhstani law stipulates fines of ten times the official emission rate. According to the Environment Prosecutor's Assistance, Nargiz Abdulla, Tengizchevroil refused to pay a fine of 750 million tenge despite the fact that Kazakhstan has the lowest rate for hazardous emissions (Vremya, March 30, 2006).
Cosmic Flight Observation Center Opens in Kazakhstan

¶17. Prime Minister Daniyal Akhmetov opened a new Cosmic Flight Observation Center in Astana on March 29, 2006. The Center was established by Federal State Unitary Enterprise of the Russian Scientific-Research Institute for Instrumentation Technology by order of the "Kazkosmos" company. The Center will allow the flight of the launch vehicle to be controlled on-line by receiving satellite information on the state of lands and ecology, and forecasting sustainability information.
(Interfax.kz, March 30, 2006)